

*The story
was a lot
different in
the 1960s.....*

Jersey Swamps May Be Bonanza

SECAUCUS, N.J. (AP) — A giant swampy wasteland in north New Jersey that has been called the most valuable stretch of real estate in the world is finally due to realize its potential.

The 60-square-mile area—a valley of dry reeds and dumping grounds—is known variously as the Jersey meadowlands, meadows, or the tidelands. It stretches 15 miles from Hackensack to Harrison shadowing Manhattan island, only two miles away. You can see the New York City skyscrapers from the desolate meadows.

For New Jersey commuters, the meadows are the offensive stench of decay that must be endured between city and suburb.

For the state of New Jersey, the meadowlands are a prize as valuable as if all the garbage landfills there had been packed with gold.

Federal Funds

New Jersey legislators have long known that, with the proper coordinated planning, this enormous swamp could be made a money-magnet, luring huge federal funds and massive private investment.

After 10 years of haggling, the state has formed a Meadowlands Commission. The commission is charged with creating a master plan that will make roads where now there are streams, make houses where now there are marshes, make industry where now there is only pollution—and most of all, make money.

The tract they control is an 18,000-acre valley of swampy land lying between two long extrusions of igneous rock. The area was once a lake, and even today, at high tide, much of the land is flooded.

The Hackensack River runs through the meadowlands and into Newark Bay, and its tributaries cross and recross one another.

Waste Catcher

Much of the meadows is used for the dumping of the waste of metropolitan New York. At the middle of the valley is the Joint Meeting Sewage Plant, a romanesque building surrounded by huge revolving fountains.

Swamp wildlife has lived here, disguised by the wide fields of tassled brown reed. Beneath the reed has been found, within one small area, some 20 varieties of plant life, including such exotic varieties as skunk grape, swamp rose-mallow, purple loosestrife, Rutland Beauty, and Joe-Pye weed.

As late as the 1930s, the streams were filled with huge water snakes. In fact, the name Secaucus, which is now the only town entirely within the confines of the meadows, comes

from the Indians' word—"Siskakes," meaning "where the snake hides."

The area is so low that high tidal waters back up through the Hackensack River and flow over the muddy land. Once, the receding tide left a smell of brine, the odor of a beach at ebb tide. Today, the high tides bring the sewage of 500,000 people that is dumped each day into Newark Bay. This pollution settles over the land and in the streams. Fish cannot live in the meadow streams.

Dam Planned

One of the first tasks in the reclamation of the meadowlands will be building a dam at the mouth of the Hackensack River, blocking the high tides and the bay sewage. The dam, as well as landfills, will be constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers for an estimated \$300 million, with most of the money coming from federal funds.

Clifford A. Goldman, acting executive director for the commission, says a master meadows zoning plan will be ready in half a year.

Goldman says no delays are likely. "Naturally, it's a long-term project. Cost benefits aren't due for 30 years. But we're proceeding without delays."

The main delay is expected to lie in assuring title to the lands. The state has laid claim to all lands that have been washed by tidal waters, and proceeds from these lands will go to the state public education fund.

Six Superior Court judges have been granted special powers to rule in title cases so that claims may be quickly settled, but it could still be years before the title situation is cleared.